1:Gallin E-4,5 (1957-1958) 1966
AD5 Taiwan Hokkien AD5

deified because of her commendable deeds. Originally, she was the protectress of seafarers, and her statue was brought from the mainland by the earliest Chinese immigrants to Taiwan. However, over the years the residents of the Hsin Hsing area have endowed Matsu with considerably greater talents, and today she is considered capable of doing many things—curing the sick, aiding in the production of a boy child, bringing rain when it is needed, and even helping someone win the National Lottery. The villagers tell a story about a man from a village in the area who went to the Lukang Matsu temple and prayed for success in the lottery. When he did not win, he returned to the temple and with a sword lopped off one of Matsu's ears.

Middle-aged village woman often discuss seriously Matsu's magnificent feats. One day several women told "how, several years earlier, Matsu had saved some boys from drowning in the Strait of Formosa just off Lukang. When a sudden storm came up, the boys' boat sank and they were about to drown when Matsu came and saved them." The women debated the question of just how Matsu had accomplished this, one saying that the goddess had provided a bridge for them to get back to shore and another that the goddess had furnished another boat and pulled them ashore.

Numerous other Taiwanese also credit Matsu with enormous powers,[2] and each year many people from far-off villages and even cities travel to Lukang in long processions by hired trucks, bicycles, pedicabs, sedan chairs, and on foot to worship Matsu on her birthday. Some Hsin Hsing villagers also go to Lukang to worship Matsu on this day, but most worship her at home because they are too busy to travel to Lukang. However, Lukang is considered a very exciting place when it is filled with the tens of thousands of people who have come to worship Matsu, and many villagers, especially young people and women, go there in the evening to watch the festivities.

In addition to the recognition which is accorded Matsu on her birthday, for at least the last forty years Hsin Hsing and eleven other villages in the area have held a joint procession each year to worship Matsu some weeks after her birthday. About this time of the year, when the irrigation water is running low in the fields of Hsin Hsing and two neighboring villages of the other eleven, the occasion is taken to ask Matsu to bring much-needed rains for the rice crop. As far back as the late 1800's, these same twelve villages were allied together to provide mutual defense against the many bandits who then ravaged the area. While the necessity for such defense was eliminated soon after the arrival of the Japanese, the cooperative relationship between these villages has been continued through the annual Matsu procession. The Matsu procession, then, still provides an occasion which brings the people together, not only the residents of a single village, but those of many villages. In the Hsin Hsing area it is the only time

1:Gallin E-4,5 (1957-1958) 1966
AD5 Taiwan Hokkien AD5

in the year when the twelve former allies come together and reaffirm their traditional unity, even though some of them may have been at odds with one another.

Each year a different village of the twelve declares its willingness to be host and takes the lead in organizing and arranging the procession. Leaders of the twelve meet there and decide which villages will furnish the entertainment which is provided along the route to and from the large Matsu temple in Lukang. The individual villages then organize, assigning by lot the various duties among their families. Some villagers are called upon to carry the large sedan chairs which bear the statues of the village gods, and others prepare and transport refreshments to the prearranged places where the procession stops for rest and food. When the lots are drawn to determine which family will assume which task, the names of the village's large landholders are always included in the drawing. While they often willingly donate refreshments, they are loath to carry a sedan chair; now, as in the past, if selected to carry one, they usually pay another villager to replace them.

On the day of the procession, the villagers assigned to carry the sedan chairs assemble at a prearranged spot to begin the circuit through the twelve villages. A large statue of Matsu, borrowed for the occasion from her temple in Lukang, is carried in a big sedan chair by several villagers. As the procession passes through the village, the residents worship the goddess, and a local shaman invites her to eat. Village teams of performers accompany the procession. They dance, give exhibitions of traditional boxing and sword play, act out little incidents or excerpts from traditional Taiwanese operas or stories, or do a dragon dance in which a large, green paper dragon is carried over the heads of many men who weave in and out to simulate his sinuous movements. The whole occasion is extremely gay and entertaining and, it is felt, most rewarding. Many food offerings to the goddess are displayed in each village along the route. They are provided by each village family and are eaten at dinner in the evening, after the Matsu procession has passed. However, only the host village, where the Matsu statue remains overnight, or members of the wealthier or large villages invite guests from outside to share in the feast.

In the spring of 1958 the area was in dire need of water, since it had not rained for several months. Several hours after that year's Matsu procession began, the sky became overcast and by mid-afternoon a drenching rain was falling on the procession as it moved through the area. By the time the circuit was completed the rain had stopped, having flooded the rice paddies and saved the crop. It did not rain again for over a month. The villagers who do not believe in the power of Matsu were surprised. A few of the young men, some of whom are well educated, have told me that despite their skepticism they did feel that "Perhaps the rain on that day was more than just a coincidence."